

This past December, our city council adopted the Warsaw Comprehensive Plan. The purpose of the Warsaw Comprehensive Plan is to give our elected officials, commission members, city employees, and community members and organizations a common direction for growth and development.

The plan was the culmination of over a year of detailed data collection, public meetings, and analysis by a professional urban planning consultant. The issues were complex. Historical perspective and future trends were part of the process. The elements of the plan include analysis of population, land use, transportation, natural resources, economic development, neighborhoods, and housing. The very methodical, public process culminated in a finished product the community can be proud of.

Other planning processes in the last few years have also yielded a Ride-Walk Master Plan and Parks Master Plan. Our wastewater utility is in the process of developing an expansion plan to meet the needs of our sewage treatment plant as it is nears 90% of its capacity.

Planning documents also gives legitimacy to future projects and grant funding requests. Quite simply, projects or plans drawn on a napkin are nothing more than ideas.

Well researched plans that are documented have inherent momentum and legitimacy. Methodical comprehensive planning that is based upon sound industry research principles will yield a credible document that represents the wishes of the community.

As an example, several months ago we met with the Norfolk and Southern Railroad and the Indiana Department of Transportation. The meeting evolved into a discussion about some type of overpass or underpass along the north and south railroad tracks in our central city. Having that project listed and diagramed in our comprehensive plan demonstrated the importance and priority of this project for our community. Consequently, the active discussion supported by the documented project need initiated interest and further action by those partners.

Which brings me to the purpose of this discussion.

Five years ago, the State of Indiana launched a program called Stellar Communities. The intention of the program was to give communities that adequately plan for growth and development, an opportunity to compete for designation as a Stellar Community and the benefit of several million dollars of grant funding to achieve projects in meeting those planning goals. You may remember that the City of Wabash was designated as an Indiana Stellar Community in 2014.

The City of Warsaw will be applying for the Indiana Stellar Community designation in 2015. Our application will list the Town of Winona Lake as a partner and underscore the collaborative future goals of our community.

Our recently adopted comprehensive plan is foundational to the application. In particular is the ride/walk connectivity of our two communities, the Market Street neighborhood revitalization, and the importance of Argonne Road as a gateway into the Town of Winona Lake and Grace College.

The greatest asset of the Stellar Program is the emphasis on comprehensive community planning. In that regard, we have already won! Our planning will carry us forward whether we are designated or not. It would just be nice to accelerate that growth with the “fruits” a designee is entitled to.